

# Light ... on a New World

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# Editorial

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THE IMPORTANCE OF **doctrine** cannot be over emphasised. The religious world of 1992 is a divided one, despite there being ONE BIBLE. The many denominations we see today, simply highlight the fact that there is much muddled thinking among Christian believers. Yet the word of God, our only guide to teaching and practice, is very clear:

‘To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.’<sup>1</sup>

These words were written about God’s people Israel at a time when they were more inclined to listen to the mutterings of the mediums, who had turned Israel away from the clear teaching of the law given to them by their God. As a result, the prophet Isaiah foretold:

‘. . . and they will be driven into darkness.’<sup>2</sup>

This is precisely the effect of forsaking the clear teaching of the word of God, and we see it **today** in the religious and the secular world of 1992! Since the time of Christ and the Apostles, declension from the truth taught by them has been the order of the day. Paul the Apostle saw it coming!

‘For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch . . .’<sup>3</sup>

So we know the source of wrong teaching. There are both external and internal influences at work. The ‘scientists’, who reject creation for evolution; the philosophers, who from early times have sought to rationalise our experiences without recourse to God’s word. From within the christian movement itself there has arisen the false teaching of the Trinity, a word not found in scripture and a declaration that Heaven is the **reward for the righteous**.

<sup>1</sup>Isaiah 8.20 (NKJV)    <sup>2</sup>Isaiah 8.22 (NKJV)    <sup>3</sup>Acts 20.27-31 (NKJV)

Light magazine has always sought to highlight false teaching against the background of First Century clarity of doctrine. There can only be ONE true message of salvation!

'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.'<sup>4</sup>

This particular issue you now have in your hands, concentrates upon two aspects of fundamental Bible teaching. We ask you to read them carefully and weigh the evidence for yourself. A correct understanding of the Bible Devil is essential if you are to appreciate what is required of US in attaining the gift of LIFE. The Holy Spirit is claimed by many religious communities to be active in the lives of believers today, but, what is the **truth** of the matter? We invite you to read on.

The Editor

<sup>4</sup>*Ephesians 4.4-6 (NKJV)*

# The Devil — the great Deceiver

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WHEN WRITING TO the early Christians, the Apostle John summed up the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ in these words:

‘... for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.’<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Paul wrote similarly, saying that Jesus died to

‘... destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.’<sup>2</sup>

These two quotations above show how important it is that we understand what the Bible means when it refers to the devil. We cannot even begin to appreciate Jesus’ great work of salvation unless we know what is meant by the devil he came to destroy.

## OUR ENEMY

In the Bible the devil is presented to us as the enemy of mankind. For example, Peter warned the believers of the first century: *‘Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.’*<sup>3</sup> Paul appealed to them: *‘Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’*<sup>4</sup> Jesus was *‘tempted of the devil.’*<sup>5</sup>

The devil is a reality; a power to be reckoned with. It is obviously important that we understand who or what this power is.

Many people would immediately think of an evil spirit being; an angel who has rebelled against God and whose aim now is to hold men and women in his power and turn them against God. This is the concept of the devil taught for centuries in the name of Christianity. Some still hold to those beliefs and claim to base them on the Bible. Others have rejected these ideas but have failed to put a proper understanding in their place.

In this article we hope to show that the Bible knows nothing of a supernatural monster of evil but uses the word ‘devil’, and also the word ‘satan’, to describe that

<sup>1</sup>1 John 3.8   <sup>2</sup>Hebrews 2.14   <sup>3</sup>1 Peter 5.8   <sup>4</sup>Ephesians 6.11   <sup>5</sup>Luke 4.2

characteristic of our natures which leads us to rebel against God and His laws and which is responsible, directly or indirectly, for all the ills of mankind, including death. The Apostle Paul described in graphic words his personal experience of this innate characteristic:

'I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.'<sup>6</sup>

We are going to suggest that this '*law of sin in my members*' is, in fact, the Bible devil. Elsewhere it is described as '*the carnal mind*' which is '*enmity against God*.'<sup>7</sup>

### A STUDY OF WORDS

The word 'devil' as used in the New Testament is derived from a Greek word '*diabolos*'. It means literally to 'dart' or 'strike through'. An accurate translation would be 'slanderer' or 'false accuser' and it has been so translated occasionally in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> On all other occasions it is rendered as 'devil' and we can decide what it refers to only by looking at the immediate context and the general teaching of the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

The devil is often identified with satan. Here we have another word which is not an English word at all. It has been taken into our language from the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. It simply means 'adversary' and there are examples of its being so translated.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that apart from the first two chapters of the book of Job there are three references only to satan in the whole of the Old Testament and no references at all to the devil.<sup>11</sup> This is very remarkable if this devil and satan is really an angel who fell from grace in the very beginning and who has since been responsible for all the sin and evil in the world.

### THE WORK OF JESUS

Having said all this, the fact remains that in the Bible both titles, the devil and satan, are frequently used of one particular power: a power which is the enemy of God and man, which is directly responsible for all the sin and wickedness in the world; what we might call the moral evil. This power is also held to be responsible, directly or indirectly, for physical evil, suffering and death. So who, or what, is this power?

<sup>6</sup>Romans 7.21-23 <sup>7</sup>Romans 8.7 <sup>8</sup>See I Timothy 3.11 <sup>9</sup>There is another Greek word used in the New Testament and translated 'devils' in the Authorised Version. This would be better rendered as 'demons' as in a more recent translation. It does not come within the scope of our present consideration. <sup>10</sup>See I Kings 11.23; Psalm 38.20 <sup>11</sup>The word 'devils' is found four times in the Authorised Version but comes from quite a different Hebrew word. It clearly refers to the false gods to whom Israel turned, eg Deuteronomy 32.15-17.

## THE DEVIL — THE GREAT DECEIVER

We go back to some words quoted earlier. We are told that Jesus came '*that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*'<sup>12</sup>

This statement establishes three facts:

- (i) The devil has the power of death;
- (ii) Jesus came to destroy the power;
- (iii) Jesus achieved this great victory through his own death.

From other parts of the Bible it is very easy to find out what has the power of death and what it is that Jesus came to destroy. Consider these brief statements:

'... by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.'<sup>13</sup>

'... the wages of sin is death.'<sup>14</sup>

'... sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.'<sup>15</sup>

Sin has the power of death; death is the consequence of sin.

Christ came to destroy the power of sin. His death on the cross was the means by which he achieved this. Again consider these brief statements:

'... he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.'<sup>16</sup>

'Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.'<sup>17</sup>

'... Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'<sup>18</sup>

By his death on the cross, Jesus put away sin, the cause of death. This is the way in which he destroyed '*him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*'

One might, perhaps, be forgiven for asking the question: if the devil is the powerful angelic being which many imagine him to be, how could the death of a righteous man destroy him? If, on the other hand, the devil is that strong impulse to sin which exists in every one of us, '*the carnal mind*', then it is not so difficult to see that in one who himself overcame that mind completely and '*did no sin*',<sup>19</sup> there could be a way of hope for the rest of mankind to be delivered from sin and death.

### THE ORIGIN OF SIN

To understand more about the devil we need to know more about sin. What is sin? How did it originate?

One thing stands out very clearly in the Bible. Man was responsible for introducing sin into the world; he must take full responsibility for maintaining it.

'... by one man sin entered into the world.'<sup>20</sup>

Here is the origin of sin. How is it kept in being?

<sup>12</sup>Hebrews 2.14   <sup>13</sup>Romans 5.12   <sup>14</sup>Romans 6.23   <sup>15</sup>James 1.15   <sup>16</sup>Hebrews 9.26

<sup>17</sup>I Peter 2.24   <sup>18</sup>John 1.29   <sup>19</sup>I Peter 2.22   <sup>20</sup>Romans 5.12

‘. . . each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.’<sup>21</sup>

Jesus taught the same truth:

‘. . . from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders . . . all these evil things come from within, and defile the man.’<sup>22</sup>

Our own experience agrees with such statements. We need no external tempter; our own hearts and minds, our own desires, are more than sufficient to lead us into sin. We saw earlier that the Apostle Paul was aware of a tremendous conflict going on, not between himself and an evil being, but between the law of God which he wanted to keep and a powerful inclination within himself to disobey that law. It is worth emphasising that in the first ten chapters of his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul deals exhaustively with sin, its origin, its effect on mankind, the mission of Christ to overcome it, and the results of his great victory. Yet there is not one reference to the devil or to satan. The whole emphasis is on *‘sin that dwelleth in me’*, *‘the carnal mind’*.

Here then is a great power operating against God and man, a great adversary, a slanderer, a deceiver. This power is associated with man himself. It is part of his very nature and he himself is powerless to overcome it. *‘There is none righteous, no, not one.’*<sup>23</sup>

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that throughout the Bible full responsibility for sin and its consequences is placed fairly and squarely on man’s shoulders. Thus the Old Testament is full of allusions to the sins of God’s people, Israel, and their consequent sufferings. Nowhere are these attributed to any external power. *‘But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart.’*<sup>24</sup> Their sufferings came from God as a punishment for their sins: *‘Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?’*<sup>25</sup>

### THE SERPENT IN EDEN

There would appear to be one exception to this general rule that all temptation to sin arises from within our own hearts and minds. We refer to the tempting of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Here truly was an external tempter, a deceiver, the serpent. As Eve explained when God challenged her: *‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’*<sup>26</sup>

Who or what was this serpent? Was it an incarnation of an evil spirit being?

<sup>21</sup>James 1.14,15 (NIV)    <sup>22</sup>Mark 7.21-23    <sup>23</sup>Romans 3.10    <sup>24</sup>Jeremiah 7.24    <sup>25</sup>Amos 3.6

<sup>26</sup>Genesis 3.13 (NIV)

There is not the slightest evidence that it was. Throughout the Bible account of what happened in Eden the serpent is treated simply as a creature, as the record states, a *'beast of the field which the LORD God had made.'*<sup>27</sup> All we are told about it is that it was more subtle than any other creature and that it had the power of speech. The only difference between the serpent and other creatures was that it had greater reasoning power and was able to express itself in words which were intelligible to the woman.

It might be asked, why did God introduce such a creature into the garden knowing that it would tempt the woman to disobey Him? The answer is that Adam and Eve had to be tested. They were not created to be mere automatons; they had to learn to use their free-will to the glory of their Creator and not merely to gratify their own desires. The suggestion that disobedience might be to their advantage came from a creature with no moral sense or responsibility. Adam and Eve failed the test. They sowed the seeds of rebellion against God. The temptation which came originally from the serpent now comes from within ourselves, from our *'carnal mind'*, or, as John describes it, *'the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.'*<sup>28</sup>

### THE BOOK OF REVELATION

It is for this reason that in the last book of the Bible, the devil and satan are associated with the serpent. There can be no doubt that many of the traditional beliefs about the devil have been derived from just three verses in the twelfth chapter of the book of Revelation.<sup>29</sup> Reading those verses as a piece of literal history would seem to provide a basis for the idea that the devil is a fallen angel. But these words were never meant to be taken literally. The opening verses of the book of Revelation tell us that it was designed primarily to show to God's servants things which were to happen after the days of the Apostle John and to do this in language which was highly figurative.<sup>30</sup> You have only to read the whole of chapter 12 to see that none of it can possibly be a literal description of events which actually happened thousands of years ago.

The book of Revelation describes in highly figurative language, a conflict between the true servants of God and the power of sin, variously represented by ferocious beasts, Babylon, a harlot, etc. In many cases these refer to governments and ecclesiastical authorities which down the centuries have persecuted God's servants. These powers became *'the false accuser'* (devil) and *'adversary'* (satan) of the true church. For example, when the early church was warned *'the devil shall cast some of you into prison'*<sup>31</sup> this could only have been a reference to the Roman authorities. Peter's reference to *'your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion'* walking about *'seeking whom he may devour'*<sup>32</sup> may well have included the Jewish authorities. This was exactly what the Apostle Paul did before his conversion to Christianity.

<sup>27</sup>Genesis 3.1    <sup>28</sup>1 John 2.16    <sup>29</sup>Revelation 12.7-9    <sup>30</sup>Revelation 1.1-3; 4.1    <sup>31</sup>Revelation 2.10

<sup>32</sup>1 Peter 5.8

In all such powers we see outward manifestations of those evil qualities which are inherent in our natures: *'greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.'*<sup>33</sup> To find the great deceiver we do not need to go outside our own hearts and minds.

'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?'<sup>34</sup>

Here is our devil, or satan, or adversary and deceiver.

### THE WORK OF JESUS

This is the devil we all have to fight against. Yet we lack the power to overcome the carnal mind completely. So we come back to the work of Jesus. He *'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'*<sup>35</sup> He overcame the devil completely and now enjoys a perfect life free from all temptation. He has overcome sin and death. Through baptism we can be associated with Christ and his great work of salvation. We can share in his victory and look forward to the day when our natures will be transformed, sin will be removed and all rebellion against God be put down. The devil, the great deceiver, will have been destroyed.

E J Toms  
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<sup>33</sup>Mark 7.22 (NIV) <sup>34</sup>Jeremiah 17.9 <sup>35</sup>Hebrews 4.15

# The gospel according to Luke

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LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF the life and teaching of Jesus, together with its sequel in the 'Acts of the Apostles', constitutes an invaluable historical backbone to the whole New Testament. Certain events in both books are dated in connection with what was taking place concurrently in the Roman world,<sup>1</sup> and 'Acts' further provides a most useful framework into which (with a high degree of probability) we can fit the earlier letters of the Apostle Paul.

Luke's gospel is unique in several ways. By virtually unanimous tradition, the writer was a Gentile (and if so, the only known non-Jewish author of any part of Scripture), a native of Antioch in Syria and a convert to Christianity long before he became Paul's travelling companion. He is extremely self-effacing, and even in Acts his presence on certain journeys is only betrayed by the use of 'we' at various points in his narrative, instead of the usual 'they'.<sup>2</sup> But Paul mentions him most appreciatively in his letters — as a fellow-worker of his in preaching the gospel,<sup>3</sup> as '*our dear doctor, Luke*'<sup>4</sup> — and finally just before his own execution: '*Only Luke is with me*'<sup>5</sup> — how Paul must have valued his loyal friend's company in the last grim days of his imprisonment!

Both the Gospel and Acts are addressed to an otherwise unknown recipient: '*most excellent Theophilus*' (or, Excellency Theophilus, as several modern versions render it) — a title indicating high office.<sup>6</sup> The name Theophilus means 'dear to God', a most happy 'coincidence' in that the matters which Luke has recorded are of the greatest interest to everyone belonging to God's family of believing Christians, a people very 'dear to Him'.

The third unique feature is the mention in Luke's introductory paragraph of other gospel accounts, with which he was obviously acquainted.<sup>7</sup> Almost certainly he

<sup>1</sup>Eg 2.1,2; 3.1; Acts 11.28; 18.2   <sup>2</sup>Eg Acts 16.10; 27.1   <sup>3</sup>Philemon 24   <sup>4</sup>Colossians 4.14 (*The Translator's New Testament, British & Foreign Bible Society 1973*)   <sup>5</sup>II Timothy 4.11

<sup>6</sup>Acts 23.26; 24.3; 26.25   <sup>7</sup>Luke 1.1,2

would have had access to Matthew's and Mark's records, which he appears to have drawn on substantially in compiling his gospel (the wording is often identical).<sup>8</sup> At the same time he has incorporated other material (parables, miracles and events in Jesus' life) which he had learned of, perhaps from his contacts with the apostles when he visited Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> No doubt he made good use of other sources too, in order to write his 'orderly account' of Jesus' earthly life and underline to Theophilus '*the certainty of the things you have been taught*'.<sup>10</sup> This emphasis should be noted, for as a doctor Luke would have been trained to observe carefully the symptoms, progress and outcome of various diseases. This same attention to detail reveals itself in his writings.<sup>11</sup> Even on the human level, therefore, they would have a strong claim to be reliable, but above all this we have the Holy Spirit's control to guide this writer, like the others, '*into all truth*'.<sup>12</sup> Paul sets his seal on it, when in one sentence he quotes first from the Old Testament and then from this gospel, evidently regarding them both as having equal authority.<sup>13</sup>

### SPECIAL FEATURES OF THIS GOSPEL

If we compare the content of this gospel with that in Matthew and Mark, the most notable difference is the addition of two or three blocks of historical narrative not recorded elsewhere. For example, the first two chapters tell us in detail of the circumstances surrounding the births of John the Baptist and of Jesus himself; also of the occasion when, during the Passover festival, the boy Jesus was found in the temple in deep discussion with the learned rabbis.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, these chapters form very close parallels with the earliest chapters of I Samuel;<sup>15</sup> subsequent sections of Luke's gospel reflect much other material in the books of Samuel and Kings, as cross-references will confirm. It seems that the Spirit of God is quietly but clearly telling us that in Jesus we have the greatest of all the prophets, and in particular the great antitype of the illustrious prophets Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. As the crowd acknowledged after the raising of the widow's son at Nain: '*A great prophet has appeared among us*'.<sup>16</sup>

The most notable block of extra material — nearly nine chapters — begins after chapter 9 verse 50, and most of it consists of parables and discourses spoken by Jesus on his way up to Jerusalem,<sup>17</sup> and recorded only by Luke.

On what must have been the last year of his three-year ministry<sup>18</sup> Jesus sent 70 disciples ahead of him to every town and place where he himself was about to go,<sup>19</sup> and then in a tremendous final-stage preaching campaign he proceeded to

<sup>8</sup>Eg Compare *Luke 6.1-11* with *Mark 3.1-6*; *8.22-39* and *Mark 4.35* to *5.20* <sup>9</sup>*Acts 21.15-18*

<sup>10</sup>*Luke 1.4 (NIV)* <sup>11</sup>Eg it is only Luke who notes it was the man's *right* hand that was withered, and that Malchus' *right* ear was healed (6.6; 22.50) <sup>12</sup>*John 16.13*

<sup>13</sup>*I Timothy 5.18*, quoting *Deuteronomy 25.4* and *Luke 10.7* <sup>14</sup>*Luke 2.41-51*; did Luke learn these things direct from Mary? <sup>15</sup>Compare *Luke 2.52* with *I Samuel 2.26*; both narratives are concerned with an old priest and a young child in the temple. <sup>16</sup>*Luke 7.16 (NIV)* <sup>17</sup>*Luke 9.51*;

*13.22*; *17.11* <sup>18</sup>*Luke 9.51* <sup>19</sup>*Luke 10.1*

cover the same ground; he was doing his utmost to awaken in Jewish hearts the realisation that he, their promised Messiah, was now in their midst, and that their national future and well-being hung on whether they would accept or reject him. It is important to note here that the 70, and 12 twelve before them, were sent out by Jesus to preach the gospel,<sup>20</sup> ie the 'good news' of the coming kingdom of God on earth,<sup>21</sup> although at this stage they had no understanding of the sacrificial aspects of Christ's work.<sup>22</sup> What would self-styled 'evangelists' proclaim today if 'the cross' was omitted from their message? Would they have *anything* left to preach?

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The compassion of Jesus (which reflects that of God his Father), especially towards widows and the wayward, features very prominently in this gospel.<sup>23</sup> Several parables in this central section make the point strongly, notably those of the Lost ('Prodigal') Son and of the Good Samaritan.<sup>24</sup> In the latter parable — to take just this one out of so many delightful examples — we have a man (typical of mankind generally) 'going downhill' on his way to Jericho, a cursed idolatrous city.<sup>25</sup> He is attacked by robbers, stripped, beaten and left to die — comparable to our own frail mortal condition after the ravages of personal and inherited sin. The Law of Moses, symbolised by priest and Levite, keeps its distance, ineffective because of human weakness.<sup>26</sup> Then the '*despised and rejected of (Jewish) men*',<sup>27</sup> the Samaritan, comes upon the scene, on *his* way up to the Holy City.<sup>28</sup> Moved with compassion he binds up the victim's wounds, puts him on his own donkey and, gently supporting him, brings him to an inn to be cared for. The next day he pays 'two pence' towards his keep, equivalent to the *redemption* money required for each person under Moses' law.<sup>29</sup> Any extra expense would be met *when he came again*, yet another confirmation of the Redeemer's promise to return. Thus Jesus is, above all others, the Neighbour we are to love as ourselves<sup>30</sup> and whose example of self-sacrifice and compassion towards others we are to imitate to the best of our ability.<sup>31</sup>

### PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS<sup>32</sup>

This parable, again peculiar to Luke, is often quoted to prove that there is at death an immediate reward in heaven or a punishment with hell torments. In fact, it supports neither view! Do 'disembodied spirits' have fingers and tongues, as depicted here? And why is the original word for hell in verse 23 'hades', ie the grave (in which Christ's soul was left for only three days)<sup>33</sup> rather than the regular word 'Gehenna', the biblical term for the place appointed for the destruction of the wicked? In any case, what crime had the rich man committed to suffer so, and what special virtue did Lazarus display to be rewarded with a place in '*Abraham's bosom*'

<sup>20</sup>Luke 9.2-6; 10.9-11    <sup>21</sup>Luke 4.43 (RV)    <sup>22</sup>Luke 18.31-34    <sup>23</sup>Luke 7.12,13; 18.3; 21.2; 7.37-50

<sup>24</sup>Luke 15.11-32; 10.25-37    <sup>25</sup>City of the moon goddess, cursed by Joshua — Joshua 6.26

<sup>26</sup>Compare Romans 8.3; Hebrews 10.1-4    <sup>27</sup>Isaiah 53.3; John 4.9; 8.48    <sup>28</sup>Significantly, this parable is in the section where Jesus is on his way up to Jerusalem.    <sup>29</sup>Exodus 30.11-16; compare Galatians 3.13    <sup>30</sup>Luke 10.27; Leviticus 19.18    <sup>31</sup>Ephesians 4.31 to 5.2

<sup>32</sup>Luke 16.19-31    <sup>33</sup>Acts 2.24-31

By comparing Scripture with Scripture we can obtain a clear and satisfying explanation to this parable, which is one of a series in which Jesus spoke out against Jewish claims of superiority over Gentiles.

It was the Jews who were *rich* — in their national inheritance of the Abrahamic promises;<sup>34</sup> as '*a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation*'<sup>35</sup> they were (figuratively) dressed in royal purple and the '*fine linen*' of God's righteousness.<sup>36</sup> But they proved to be '*unjust stewards*' of this divine favour, as a previous parable had demonstrated.<sup>37</sup> Their exclusiveness kept '*leprous*' Gentiles outside, like dogs, begging for the crumbs which dropped from so magnificent a feast (the language at this point runs closely parallel with that used by Jesus to the Syrophenician woman<sup>38</sup>).

What then did Jesus mean by '*Abraham's bosom*', in which Lazarus ultimately found refuge? We have seen that the setting of the parable is *feasting*; the simile is now continued, because it was indisputably at a feast ('*the last supper*') that John, '*the disciple that Jesus loved*', reclined in the bosom of his Master.<sup>39</sup> The Jews have a longstanding tradition (based on Isaiah 25.6) that at Messiah's coming there will be a time of great rejoicing, which they call 'the Messianic Feast'. Jesus clearly alludes to this in Luke 13.28-30, where he expressly says that people will come from all four quarters of the globe and take their places *at the feast* in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but '*the sons of the kingdom*' (ie the Jews) will be thrown out!<sup>40</sup>

Subsequent history confirms this interpretation of the parable. By apostolic preaching '*a door of faith*' was opened to Gentile believers on an equal footing with the Jewish Christians,<sup>41</sup> and many non-Jews throughout the Roman world and beyond made themselves fellow-heirs of the Abrahamic promises<sup>42</sup> and therefore prospective guests in the '*feast of fat things*' to be celebrated when Jesus returns to earth. But what of the Jew? While many individual Jews accepted Jesus' claims, *as a nation* they rejected him. Forty years later the Romans overthrew their commonwealth and scattered them into all countries, where they have been persecuted and *tormented* for nearly two thousand years, just as Moses had foreseen.<sup>43</sup> Nationally they *died* in A.D. 70; it has been our privilege in the twentieth century to see the first steps of their '*resurrection*' from this Gentile graveyard and their return to the land of their forefathers.<sup>44</sup> This is a preparation for the time when the Spirit of God will be breathed into them, infusing them with a living faith in the Son of God whom their ancestors crucified.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Romans 9.3-5; 11.17    <sup>35</sup>Exodus 19.6    <sup>36</sup>Compare Revelation 3.18 and Luke 19.8

<sup>37</sup>Luke 16.1-13    <sup>38</sup>Matthew 15.26,27    <sup>39</sup>John 13.23-25    <sup>40</sup>Compare Matthew 8.11-12 (RV); the NIV rendering in Luke 13 brings out more clearly the fact that a feast is being promised.

<sup>41</sup>Acts 11.18; 14.27 (RV); Galatians 3.28    <sup>42</sup>Ephesians 2.12-19; 3.6    <sup>43</sup>Deuteronomy 28.65-67

<sup>44</sup>Ezekiel 37.12,13    <sup>45</sup>Ezekiel 36.27; Zechariah 12.10

The words which Jesus put into Abraham's mouth in the parable are just as valid today:

'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'<sup>46</sup>

John's account of a real Lazarus raised from the dead, and Jesus' own resurrection, show only too sadly the truth of this statement<sup>47</sup> — but how few today, even in the churches, really believe '*Moses and the Prophets*'! But for Jesus<sup>48</sup> and for Paul and the other apostles<sup>49</sup> this Old Testament foundation was all-important and sufficient.

### THE MOUNT OLIVET PROPHECY<sup>50</sup>

A practical example of how Jesus based his convictions on Moses and the Prophets will be found in the great discourse he gave to four of his disciples about the signs which would herald his return, and the end of the present age; Matthew and Mark record the same prophecy.<sup>51</sup> Jerusalem, Jesus said, would be besieged and taken, and her people scattered '*until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*',<sup>52</sup> ie the pre-ordained period during which, owing to the spiritual blindness of Israel, God would call a vast number of hejrs to His kingdom from all nations. Jesus then indicated two great signs of his coming again — both have dominated world politics during the last half century; firstly, the budding of the 'fig tree nation'<sup>53</sup> (specifically Israel, as a previous parable had shown<sup>54</sup>); AND, secondly, unprecedented distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows, men fainting with fear as they contemplate what the future has in store for the world.<sup>55</sup> It is the generation that witnesses these signs which will also see their culmination in

'... the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.'<sup>56</sup>

In the face of such terrible portents, the human reaction is '*let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die*'.<sup>57</sup> Jesus warns us to be on our guard against this folly; rather, we are to stay alert, and pray we may be permitted to escape all these things WHICH MUST HAPPEN (peace conferences and pacts notwithstanding!) and to '*stand*' (ie be found approved) before the Son of man.<sup>58</sup> This sober alertness is essential because everyone will be rewarded *according to their deeds*,<sup>59</sup> and a last-minute repentance is no acceptable substitute for a life of dedication to God's service. The following incident is no exception to this rule.

### THE DYING THIEF

Again it is only Luke who records the remarkable conversation which took place between Jesus and one of two thieves who were being crucified with him.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Luke 16.31 (NIV) <sup>47</sup>John 12.9-11; Matthew 28.11-15 <sup>48</sup>Luke 19.46; 20.37; 20.17; 20.41-44, etc <sup>49</sup>Acts 17.2,3; 24.14; 26.22,23 <sup>50</sup>Luke 21.5-36 <sup>51</sup>Matthew 24.5 to 25; Mark 13

<sup>52</sup>Luke 21.24 (RSV) <sup>53</sup>Luke 21.29-31 <sup>54</sup>Luke 13.6-9 <sup>55</sup>Luke 21.25,26 <sup>56</sup>Luke 21.27

<sup>57</sup>Isaiah 22.13; I Corinthians 15.32 <sup>58</sup>Luke 21.36; compare Ephesians 6.13

<sup>59</sup>Matthew 16.27; Romans 2.6; compare Galatians 6.7,8 <sup>60</sup>Luke 23.39-43

Wrong inferences have been drawn from this account because readers have not paid proper attention to what was actually said. The repentant thief had asked: '*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*'<sup>61</sup> Such a request demonstrated the man's firm conviction that Jesus would indeed return to earth in person and establish his kingdom here, as he had often promised.<sup>62</sup> It is obvious too that this dying man was fully convinced that Jesus was the true Messiah in spite of all appearances to the contrary — at a time when (apart from Jesus himself) not even the disciples retained any hope in the success of their Master's great mission. The dying thief thus manifested a stupendous and unparalleled faith that both merited and received an unqualified response. No so-called 'death-bed repentance' bears comparison with faith of this magnitude; it remains unique in history.

In this context the Lord's favourable reply suggests, what in fact the Old Testament confirms, that his coming kingdom will be veritable '*paradise*'. The word '*paradise*' strictly means a beautiful, well-watered park or orchard, and was originally applied to the garden of Eden.<sup>63</sup> The restored kingdom of Israel (the nucleus of the future kingdom of God on earth) will be '*paradise regained*', for so have God's prophets predicted.<sup>64</sup> Living permanently in it will be a new Adam (Jesus) and a new Eve (his collective bride, made up of all who have been faithful to him), exercising dominion over all the earth.<sup>65</sup>

The one problem remaining is the use of the word '*today*', for it is clear that even Jesus himself did not enter his reward — any reward — on that day or the next; for three days and nights he was in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>66</sup> The difficulty vanishes once we realise that the punctuation depends on the decision (and religious prejudice) of the translators — the early Greek manuscripts did not have commas. Put the comma AFTER today and all becomes plain. The thief had asked to be remembered WHEN Jesus returned; the reply is:

'I tell you the truth *today*, you will be with me in paradise.' (Luke 23.43 NIV)

The thief did not have to wait until his resurrection for reassurance; he received it there and then.<sup>67</sup>

### ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS<sup>68</sup>

Once more we are (humanly speaking) indebted to Luke for this fascinating account of Jesus' appearance to two disciples very soon after his resurrection. They were walking to this village, some seven miles from Jerusalem, feeling very sad and depressed. A stranger joined them and induced them to voice their deep disappointment at what seemed to be the collapse of all they had hoped for.<sup>69</sup> The

<sup>61</sup>Luke 23.42 (NIV) <sup>62</sup>Luke 9.26; 12.35-40; 17.24-30; 18.8; 19.11-27 (to take only Luke's gospel as evidence!) <sup>63</sup>Genesis 2.8 (Septuagint); the Hebrew word occurs only in *Nehemiah* 2.8; *Ecclesiastes* 2.5 and *Song* 4.13 <sup>64</sup>Isaiah 51.3 <sup>65</sup>I Corinthians 15.45; II Corinthians 11.2,3; *Ephesians* 5.31,32; *Hebrews* 2.5-12; *Revelation* 2.7 <sup>66</sup>Luke 23.50-54; compare *Matthew* 12.40 <sup>67</sup>Contrast Joseph's disappointment — *Genesis* 40.14-23 <sup>68</sup>Luke 24.13-35 <sup>69</sup>Luke 24.17

newcomer entranced them by his exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures, proving from these that it was essential that Israel's destined king should first of all 'suffer', ie become the sin-offering, the antitypical lamb to take away the sin of the world.<sup>70</sup> What fools they had been not to realise this! How reluctant to believe all that the Prophets had spoken!<sup>71</sup> And then the stranger's identity was revealed to them as they sat down to a meal, and he vanished from their sight. A little later he appeared again to the 11 disciples and told them that EVERYTHING written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled.<sup>72</sup>

This last chapter of Luke's gospel ought to be compulsory reading for doubters, and especially for 'New Testament christians' (those short-sighted people who deem the Old Testament to be of no great importance on doctrinal matters). How transparently honest and convincing is this record of Christ's resurrection, the reality of his bodily presence among his disciples (even sharing a meal with them<sup>73</sup>), and how explicit is the support given by Jesus to the whole Old Testament as the firm foundation of the Christian hope!

And now, with these appearances of the risen Lord, the way was clear for the disciples to go out into all the world, to bear witness to the resurrection and to herald the great day of the Lord's return. It is then that he will rule the earth in righteousness and reign over the house of Jacob for ever on the throne of his forefather David — just as the angel Gabriel had promised to Mary before his birth.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Luke 24.26-46; John 1.29    <sup>71</sup>Luke 24.25    <sup>72</sup>Luke 24.44    <sup>73</sup>Luke 24.41-43; Acts 10.40,41

<sup>74</sup>Luke 1.30-33; Acts 3.18-21; 10.42; 17.30,31.



### THE COVER PICTURE

THE BUTTERFLY in all its glory is a testimony to the creative power of God. The process by means of which the butterfly changes from **chrysalis** to a delicate and beautiful winged insect, is known as **metamorphosis**. This English word is of Greek extraction and it has the meaning of 'a complete change of physical form or substance'.

The message of the Bible for mortal man is that, **he too** must undergo a similar process of change. The Apostle Paul, writing to believers in Rome said:

'... be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.'<sup>1</sup>

Paul uses the word **transformed**, which in the original Greek of the New Testament is the word **metamorphoo**. The message of the Bible, of which the butterfly is a beautiful reminder is, that we should not allow the world or age we live in to squeeze us into **its** mould, but rather to be transformed by our knowledge of God and His Word. As Paul also wrote to the Corinthians:

'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Romans 12.2    <sup>2</sup>2 Corinthians 5.17

# The Holy Spirit

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NEARLY TWO THOUSAND years ago, there was gathered together in a house in Jerusalem, a group of ordinary men. Suddenly, there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.<sup>1</sup>

The immediate result of this very strange phenomenon was that these ordinary men were able to speak in other languages so that they were understood by visitors to Jerusalem from all over the then known world.

This is the account, given in the Acts of the Apostles, of the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the apostles of Jesus. It was a momentous occasion and it was to have profound effects on the early christian church. On that day alone there were three thousand new believers baptised in Jerusalem.

## WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

What is this power of the Holy Spirit?

Traditional christian teaching claims the Holy Spirit, (or Holy Ghost, as the King James Authorised version translates the word) is a person — a God in fact, the third person of the Trinity — God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Many christians also claim that they possess the power of the Holy Spirit and are, like those first century apostles, able to speak with tongues and perform other miracles.

The Bible, however, does not give support to either of these claims.

## THE 'HOLY SPIRIT' AND THE 'SPIRIT OF GOD'

The term 'Holy Spirit', with only few exceptions, is exclusive to the New Testament but it is clear that the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is the same as the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of the Lord, in the Old Testament. Two instances in the New Testament make this clear.

<sup>1</sup>Acts 2.2-4

On the occasion referred to above the Apostle Peter explained to the amazed crowds just what that wonderful display of Holy Spirit power was. He referred them to the prophet Joel and quoted these words from his prophecy:

'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of *my Spirit* upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: 'And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of *my Spirit*; and they shall prophesy.'<sup>2</sup>

Clearly Peter recognised here that the power that had just descended upon those first century believers was the Spirit of God spoken of by the prophet.

The Lord Jesus himself drew the same inference after he received the power of the Holy Spirit at his baptism. Preaching to the Jews in the synagogue he quoted to them from the prophecy of Isaiah:

'The *Spirit of the Lord* is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'<sup>3</sup>

When Jesus had finished this quotation from Isaiah he added,

'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.'<sup>4</sup>

Jesus, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, applied the words of that prophecy to himself.

### THE SPIRIT IS GOD'S POWER

The Greek word translated as spirit in the New Testament is 'pneuma'; in the Old Testament the Hebrew word is 'ruach'. Both these words mean 'breath' or 'wind' conveying the idea of an invisible, immaterial power and when used in association with God refer to His power.

For instance, in the Genesis account of creation we read of the creative power of the Spirit of God:

'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the *Spirit of God* moved upon the face of the waters.  
And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.'<sup>5</sup>

David, Israel's great king, sang of the greatness of God and of His creative power:

'O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.  
Thou sendest forth *thy spirit*, they are created . . .'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Acts 2.17,18, quoting Joel 2. 28-32    <sup>3</sup>Luke 4.18,19, quoting Isaiah 61.1,2    <sup>4</sup>Luke 4.21

<sup>5</sup>Genesis 1.1-3    <sup>6</sup>Psalms 104.24,30.

The spirit or power of God also continuously sustains the life God created. This is recognised by Elihu, one of the friends of Job when he was discussing the greatness of God. He acknowledged he was created by God's great power and he also recognised that it was God's spirit which kept him alive and that God could withdraw that breath of life whenever He wished:

'The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.

'If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself *his spirit* and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.'<sup>7</sup>

The Apostle Paul also acknowledged this same truth when he said:

'For in him [God] we live, and move, and have our being.'<sup>8</sup>

### GOD'S POWER USED FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

Now, not only does God use His spirit, His power, to create and sustain all life, He also uses it in particular ways for the furtherance of His specific purpose — which is to *'fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord'*<sup>9</sup> and to give Him pleasure.<sup>10</sup>

The word 'Holy' means 'separate' and from scriptural usage in both the Old and New Testaments the Holy Spirit clearly refers to the power of God used for His specific purpose with creation.

This specific purpose of God involves the calling out of a people for His name. In the Old Testament this people was the nation of Israel. In the New Testament the call was extended to include faithful individuals from all nations of the earth.

There are many instances in the Old Testament where God gave His spirit to individual men so that they could work out His purpose with His people. In the period of the Judges when Israel were establishing themselves in the promised land God bestowed His Spirit on certain great men. We read the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.<sup>11</sup> The Spirit of the Lord also came upon Samson and *'began to move'* him.<sup>12</sup> Through the Spirit of the Lord these men performed mighty feats and they were able to defeat the enemies of God's people.

Scripture records that the Spirit of the Lord also rested on David and others of the prophets. In fact, Peter tells us that the Old Testament scriptures were written under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. Peter writes:

'For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.'<sup>13</sup>

Paul makes it clear that when Peter refers to the Holy Spirit he is referring to God's Spirit or power as he writes:

'All scripture is given by inspiration of God. . .'<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Job 33.4; 34.14,15    <sup>8</sup>Acts 17.28    <sup>9</sup>Isaiah 11.9    <sup>10</sup>Rev 4.11    <sup>11</sup>Judges 11.29    <sup>12</sup>Judges 13.25

<sup>13</sup>2 Peter 1.21    <sup>14</sup>2 Timothy 3.16

Literally this means by the 'breathing out of God' — the Spirit of God.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE FIRST CENTURY

The most notable period of manifestation of the Holy Spirit was the period recorded in the New Testament. This was the time of great transition from the Old Testament Mosaic covenant relationship to the establishment of Christianity and the spreading of the gospel to all nations of the earth. Jesus himself, the great Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures, was born by the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke records the angel's words to Mary before Jesus was born:

'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.'<sup>15</sup>

It is notable here how the term the Holy Spirit and the power of the Highest are used synonymously, again confirming the truth that the Holy Spirit is none other than the power of Almighty God Himself — not a separate person. This pronouncement of the angel also makes nonsense of the whole concept of the Trinity: that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was the son of the Father and yet also was co-equal and co-eternal with them both!

At his baptism we have already noted how the Holy Spirit descended (in bodily shape like a dove) upon him and that being full of the Holy Spirit he returned from Jordan. He went throughout the towns and villages of Galilee and Judea, teaching and performing miracles. He healed the sick, he made the blind to see, the deaf to hear and caused the lame to walk. He was even able to raise the dead. All these, John records, were signs so that people should believe:

'... these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.'<sup>16</sup>

The teachings of Jesus ran contrary to established orthodox religious teaching, but the power of the Holy Spirit gave Jesus authority to challenge the religious attitudes and gave the people evidence that his power was from a higher authority than those leaders. For he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.<sup>17</sup>

All this Jesus was able to do through the power of the Holy Spirit resting upon him as he said to the Jews: *'The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do.'*<sup>18</sup>

Now Jesus, before he ascended to heaven, promised the disciples they, too, would receive the power of the Holy Spirit so that they could be witnesses to the truth of Jesus in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Luke 1.35   <sup>16</sup>John 20.31   <sup>17</sup>Matthew 7.28,29   <sup>18</sup>John 5.19   <sup>19</sup>Acts 1.8

We noted at the beginning of this article the wonderful effect this had on the disciples; how that visitors from all over the world were able to hear the gospel message in their own language.

The apostles went on to perform many wonderful miracles with this power. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that Peter was able to expose, with such awesome consequences, the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira;<sup>20</sup> it was by the same power that he healed a man who had been lame from birth.<sup>21</sup> Many who were sick were healed<sup>22</sup> and even the dead were raised to life.<sup>23</sup> The Apostle Paul, when shipwrecked on his way to Rome, was also bitten by a viper. The terrified islanders looked on waiting for him to fall down dead. The fact that he did not was a fulfilment of the words of Jesus when he sent forth the disciples to preach the gospel:

‘... these signs [said Jesus] shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.’<sup>24</sup>

## DO BELIEVERS POSSESS THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TODAY?

Now the question arises: does this power of the Holy Spirit operate through believers in these days in the same way that it did in those New Testament times? A careful reading of the scriptures clearly indicates that it does not. Those gifts of the Holy Spirit were sent for the specific purpose of establishing the early christian church in a hostile world. When Jesus was taken from among them the infant church was threatened by both Judaism and paganism. The New Testament Scriptures were not yet written to fully expound the work of Christ as the promised Messiah.

Because he was leaving the believers in such a vulnerable state, Jesus promised them the Comforter:

‘But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.’<sup>25</sup>

This was one of the reasons the Holy Spirit was sent — to bring all things to their remembrance. Once the New Testament Scriptures were written this need ceased to exist.

## A FIRSTFRUITS

When the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost Peter recognised it as being a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. Now Peter clearly relates this prophecy of Joel to the ‘last days’ and, although this was undoubtedly the last days of the Jewish nation (Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70), a study of Joel will indicate the complete fulfilment of this prophecy is still sometime in the future.

<sup>20</sup>Acts 5.1-11    <sup>21</sup>Acts 3.7    <sup>22</sup>Acts 19.11,12    <sup>23</sup>Acts 9.40    <sup>24</sup>Mark 16.17,18    <sup>25</sup>John 14.26

The feast of Pentecost, however, was also known as the feast of firstfruits, when Israel rejoiced before God in thanksgiving for the first of the harvest — a token of the greater harvest that was to come later in the year.

In the same way this outpouring of the Holy Spirit was an earnest, a visible measure of the greater revelation of God's power that will be seen in the age to come. The Apostle Paul writes of those who had partaken of the Holy Spirit as having '*tasted . . . the powers of the world (age) to come.*'<sup>26</sup>

### A MORE EXCELLENT WAY

Writing to the believers at Corinth Paul also indicated the gifts of the Holy Spirit would cease when the full knowledge of the gospel was revealed. He wrote that the various gifts were to enable the church to become a living body working in harmony. But he spoke of a 'more excellent way'<sup>27</sup> and emphasised the need for love, because:

'Charity [love] never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail: whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect [or complete] is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.'<sup>28</sup>

Paul here is referring to the completion of the New Testament by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith, hope and love were to remain, but the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which had revealed knowledge and prophecies only in part, were to be succeeded by a more excellent way — the full revelation of the gospel message through Jesus Christ in the New Testament scriptures.

So the gifts of the Holy Spirit were withdrawn when the New Testament was completed. Paul could not be referring here to the cessation of the Holy Spirit gifts at a still future date because when Jesus returns the power of the Holy Spirit will also return in full measure. The first century gifts were a first fruit, a token, of the powers of the age to come. Faith and hope will then give way to sight and realisation and love will be paramount.

Until that time the Holy Scriptures, the spirit word, is sufficient for salvation. The Apostle Paul wrote:

' . . . the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Hebrews 6.5 <sup>27</sup>1 Corinthians 12.31 <sup>28</sup>1 Corinthians 13.8-10 <sup>29</sup>2 Timothy 3.15-17

# Postbag

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## NUMBERS IN THE BIBLE

A correspondent, David Idibie from Lagos, Nigeria has asked about the significance of the number 40 which appears so often in the Bible.

### *Reply from the Correspondence Editor:*

There is no doubt that there are a large number of both word and number patterns in the Bible. For example, the acrostic Psalm 119 starts every section with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In Hebrew, the letters were used instead of numbers with aleph = 1, beth = 2 and so on. Words, therefore, each have a numerical *significance* as well as a *meaning*. For instance, 'Jesus' has the number 888 as well as meaning 'Yahweh Saves'. The numbers associated with the names Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego also add up to 888. This is not just coincidental as there are hundreds of similar patterns on which many books have been written. This is not surprising as 'By the breath of God frost is given' (Job 37.10) so that patterns can be seen in **the creation** as well as in the **word** of the Creator.

The significance of simple numbers is, to some extent subjective. *The importance of 7* comes from the Sabbath of rest which pointed forward to the millennial reign of Christ on earth after 6000 years of man's rule. Whenever we come across **seven** in the Bible it is usually related to the coming Kingdom. For example, at the fall of Jericho which preceded the entry into the promised land (a type of the kingdom) there are lots of sevens. *The number 3* relates to the sign of Jonah and the day of resurrection as explained by Christ in Matthew 12.39,40. If you look for 'three days' you will be amazed by the consistency of the pattern.

*Now turning to the number 40*, the nation of Israel were tried in the wilderness for 40 years until a new generation was born. David and Solomon both reigned for 40 years. So 40 years *could* be a generation. This could help us understand the prophecy of the coming of Christ in Luke 21.32. On the other hand, the 40 days of rain at the flood, the 40 days of Moses in the mount and the 40 days of Jesus in the wilderness were all times of trial or probation. Perhaps both 40 days and 40 years could represent *the period of man's sojourn on the earth to form characters pleasing to God*.

Richard Griffiths  
Correspondence Editor

